

ADELINE DALEY

Our Parakeet's For the Birds

Just one week ago we were happy with our parakeet, "Birdie." (Notice what clever names we choose for our pets.) We were satisfied that we had an average bird with normal intelligence and a fair voice. Not a feathered Robert Goulet, by any means, but a performer of, perhaps, the caliber of a Bobby Breen.

Now we are looking at "Birdie" in a more critical light after reading the book Patrice sent for from a pet food company entitled, "How to Train Your Parakeet to Talk, Play Card Tricks and Perform on the High Wire." The first step, of course, is to see that your bird receives a proper diet of the numerous products the company has on the market for parakeets: seed, treats, conditioning foods, cuttle bone, gravel, biscuits and little bells sprayed with extra minerals, vitamins and proteins.

Believe me, "Birdie" eats better than we do.

Yet, despite all of these benefits and constant efforts to teach it to utter at least one word, "Birdie" has remained tongue-tied. Frankly, I think it's too busy eating all of the food we provide, to have time to learn to talk.

But to quote from the parakeet manual: "The average bird can be taught a vocabulary of 50 to 100 words." I doubt that some of our kids have as large a vocabulary. At least, they don't use it.

The book also discloses that parakeets can be taught to speak in a "down East" twang or a Southern drawl, recite nursery rhymes and whistle actual tunes. All I can say is that a bird with all that talent should be earning \$5000 a week on the Ed Sullivan show, instead of being cooped up in a cage.

I wonder, however, if we're being a little too harsh on our bird. I have listened to the chirpings and peepings of our friends' parakeets and they sound just as unintelligible as the sounds "Birdie" makes. Yet our friends excitedly exclaim, "Listen! He's reciting the Gettysburg Address."

As untalented as "Birdie" appears alongside other parakeets who walk tight ropes carrying umbrellas, pull the ace of spades from a deck of cards and push little carts around the cage, there is one member of the household who remains utterly fascinated with just watching it by the hour. Puff, the cat.

But I fear that the one "trick" "Birdie" has mastered—opening the latch on the cage door—will be its undoing. I hope that one day I won't have to ask our taciturn bird, "What's the matter, the cat got your tongue?"

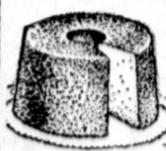
Garden Checklist

1. If you haven't already, prune roses this month. At the same time strip off any remaining leaves that have not fallen of their own accord. Clean up fallen leaves around roses.
2. The perennial vegetables—artichokes, asparagus and rhubarb—are not only good eating, but are attractive in the ornamental garden. They can go in now.
3. This is bare of planting season when your dormant plants such as roses and trees are least expensive and easiest to move. It's the best time to plant flowering trees to add to your enjoyment for spring bloom. Give them a generous hole, soak them well, then let the January rains take over.
4. Violas and pansies can still be set out over a bulb bed. Primula Malacoides, the Fairy Primrose, can go in for an early spring border in shaded beds.
5. Winter feeding will often do surprising things to a bedraggled lawn.

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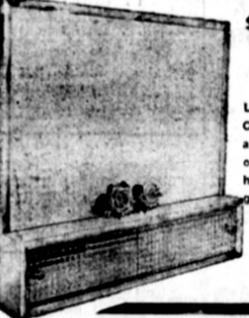
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